

OVERVIEW

FF-NEWS: FAMILIES FIRST-NUTRITION EDUCATION AND WELLNESS SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate objective—and test—of programs such as **FF-NEWS** is to teach participants to use what they have learned; to change their behaviors in positive ways. Thus, attention has been given to the need for **FF-NEWS** to be viewed in a positive light by the participants; for example, as a delightful enriching respite from the normal routine. The **FF-NEWS** program fosters respect for the knowledge and skills participants bring to the training. **FF-NEWS** seeks to take participants to a higher level, a “new place” as it were. In this light, the **FF-NEWS** curriculum uses a wide variety of instructional and assessment approaches that have been specially designed and selected with a view towards transforming participant training into action that embraces interconnected beneficiaries: individuals, families, and communities.

FF-NEWS is about “Xcellence.” Collectively, its components make up a curriculum that represent an action plan for behavior modification—in the way we reach under-served populations, and how training is received and used by targeted populations. The seeds of success are built into the curriculum.

THE FF-NEWS CURRICULUM

The information contained in this curriculum is based on recent results of scientific and educational research, observation, and clinical trials. Premier sources of information have been tapped in the scientific, educational, advocacy, and policy-making communities. The curriculum also incorporates the goals of signal documents such as *Healthy People 2000* and *Beyond Rhetoric, A New American Agenda for America's Families and Children*. Also incorporated are principles from respected and proven national nutrition and wellness campaigns such as *Team Nutrition* and *Five-A-Day*.

The curriculum is comprised of six components: an informative and instructive introductory section, four content modules, and a resource/reference section. Each of the content modules addresses a critical subject area related to nutrition, health and wellness. The content modules are identified and briefly described below.

I. Module One: Balancing Food Preferences with Knowledge of Nutrition

This module introduces the **FF-NEWS** program to the recipient population through fourteen lessons focused on basic nutrition information and attention to typical dietary patterns of the geographic regions where they live. The subjects of the modules include nutrition information and misinformation, nutrients (*fats, carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins, and minerals*), *Dietary Guidelines* and the *Food Guide Pyramid*, and dietary patterns (*Southern, Tex-Mex, and Soul Food*).

II. Module Two: Health Status and Age-Related Nutrition

Ten lessons comprise this module designed to focus on the role of nutrition in preventing the major medical disorders occurring in the recipient population. Recent research findings from the nation's premier research institutes and practices recommended by leading advocacy organizations are incorporated in the lessons. Apart from the lesson which introduces the module, the subjects of the lessons are obesity, weight management, health consequences of dieting and weight loss, physical activity, behavior modification and social support, diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease.

III. Module Three: Enhancing Management Skills

Improving management skills is the core concept for this module. It focuses on extending family income through cost efficient procedures. There are 24 lessons in this module, the subjects of which are time management, budgeting, menu planning, food selection, food preparation, and home gardening.

IV. Module Four: Ensuring Food Quality and Safety

Focusing primarily on consumer use at the household level, the lessons incorporate state-of-the-art information on food safety, and the principles of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (*HACCP*) plan. The subjects of the eight lessons are basic sanitation and safety practices, basic food safety, foodborne illness, food purchasing and storage, product dating, food thawing, preparation and serving, kitchen safety, food additives, and information sharing.



The curriculum's integrating themes are basic nutrition, physical activity, health promotion and disease prevention, cultural diversity, resilience, self-reliance, self-esteem, and personal responsibility. Further, the curriculum fosters development of basic skills such as goal setting, decision making, problem-solving, and time management. Further still, it recognizes and appreciates the role of family and culture in fostering lifestyle changes in nutritional practices. Culturally sensitive, it attempts to broaden cross-cultural understanding about regional food preferences and practices.

The curriculum has an interactive design; it is punctuated with many innovative and original instructional and assessment activities. The lessons are partially scripted. They promote culturally appropriate, consistent, and accurate nutrition and wellness messages for a special needs adult audience. In multi-site demonstration programs, the scripted approach affords a common base from which all training emanates, while providing for the necessary customization needed for population differences from site-to-site.

Each module is self-contained. However, there exists a natural relationship between the modules, and some lessons assume prior instruction in concepts from other lessons. A variety of instructional approaches have been devised.

A conscious attempt has been made to avoid giving the recipient/participant too much technical information, but rather the most important information that will likely help the recipient learn to deal with the practical problems of nutrition, and health and wellness.

The modules assume a sixth-grade literacy level, recognizing that recipients may possess limited literacy skills. Some recipients may have limited language skills in both English and their native tongue; while some may be very proficient in English and other languages. Additional effort on the part of the trainer may be needed in working with participants as regards language and instruction.

FF-NEWS uses principles of adult learning. Multisensory learning—involving sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch—along with experiential learning, cooperative learning, competitive learning, and technology-based learning, have been blended to create an exciting mixture of activities to stimulate and motivate learning.

INSTRUCTIONAL FEATURES

FF-NEWS uses its unique name to expand the long-standing service identity of 1890 Extension Programs by building a special identity for its nutrition education program. Families First, abbreviated as "**FF**," is used throughout as an easy-to-use and recognize program identifier.

The instructional experiences of each module are flavored and textured by the module's content. Thus, several activities are unique to a module because they are customized for the particular learning experience. For example, *Heartbreak Hotel*, was expressly developed to heighten awareness about cardiovascular disease and its health consequences to a vulnerable population. While it can certainly be adapted to teach other concepts, it is used only once in **FF-NEWS**. In contrast, the **FFTIME GAME** is used as an introductory activity for teaching meal management, where lifestyles and time use often conflict, leading to potentially stressful situations for family members. However, albeit time management is critical in all of the modules, the **FFTIME GAME** is also used only once in the curriculum.

The instructional features are varied, and recognize plainly that "not everything works with every one." The foundation of the multisensory approach to learning recognizes that some of us must see, others must hear, and others must see, hear, and do; still others must interact as they see, hear, and do! Discussion techniques such as circular response, round robin, panels, question cards, stand and deliver, etc., are used throughout to encourage active learning and involvement by all participants, and to make the curriculum and the learning experience come alive!!

Following is a summary of the major features of **FF-NEWS**:

Affirmations

Affirmations are a kind of self-talk. They are positive assertions written and made by and about an individual which are used to help focus thoughts and actions. They also help sort out truths, beliefs, attitudes, and values, and can improve self-discipline. A centuries-old technique, affirmations usually are inspiring statements that enhance self-esteem, and self-confidence, and lead to the accomplishment of tasks and goals.

FFAffirmations, as they are termed for **FF-NEWS**, are very special because they are based on the learning experiences offered to participants in the Cooperative Extension's **FF-NEWS** Program. However, **FFAffirmations** follow the same pattern as most affirmations: They are complete sentences; usually brief, positive, and inspiring statements that direct thoughts, actions, and behaviors. Most often they are written in the present or future tense. **FFAffirmations** are best used if written and repeated many times during the day, for at least 30 days. They may also be recorded onto cassette tapes and played repeatedly.



Cartoons

Nutrition and health is no laughing matter, although its instruction can be fun. The contextual use of cartoons, while designed to create a light moment, builds on the inherent value of comic relief to motivate individuals to examine their behavior, and having done so, to begin to take courageous action. The creative expression of popular cartoon characters can be used for comic relief in all of the **FF-NEWS** lessons. Cartoons, for example, *Cathy*®, *Curtis*®, *Beatle Bailey*®, *Jump Street*®, *Baby Blues*®, and *One Big Happy*®, have included many “lessons” focusing on dietary patterns, culture and food, and social support for behavior modification.

Contracts

Contracts appeal to an individual’s inherent integrity. An individual who “signs his or her name on the dotted line” is very likely to follow through with the details of the contract, (*i.e.*, the promises made).

Contracts are used in **FF-NEWS** as a means to facilitate transfer of learning to positive action, and to assess whether participants are learning the information being presented to them. Contracts can be developed for many more of the lessons than now is the case. Critical aspects of the contract include (a) the specifics of what is to be done; (b) by when (*i.e.*, the time frame); (c) the terms for accomplishment (*if any*); and (d) procedures for changing the contract (*if any*).

FFLine

The **FFLine** is a special “place” to hold things that need a more substantive response than can be provided at the moment. As ideas, questions, concerns, sensitive issues, etc., arise for which further exploration is needed, they are placed on the **FFLine**. Later during instruction, or at some time prior to the end of the module, the program leader discusses the item with the total group or with one or two individuals. The process allows time as necessary to secure additional information and adapt lesson plans to participant needs.

There are many ways to create an **FFLine**:

- (1) Treat it as an abstract concept, and mentally place the items on a waiting line.
- (2) Cover a section of a bulletin board with bright colored paper and write the word “**FFLINE**” at the top. As items come up, write them on the bulletin board.
- (3) Write the word “**FFLINE**” on a chalkboard. As items come up, write them on the chalkboard.

- (4) Get a real clothesline and clothes pins. Set up the clothesline somewhere in the classroom. When an item comes up, have the participant write it on a sheet of paper and hang it up. The response can be written on the paper, or discussed orally. [This latter way is the most delightful!]

FF-NEWS Basket

Any good program leader knows that a sturdy carryall is an essential item for effective experiential teaching and learning. Thus, the **FF-NEWS** basket is intended to be a sturdy and convenient carryall for conveying instructional supplies and materials to the sites. At the same time, it provides a “festive” touch for teaching demonstrations, and for disseminating materials and supplies to participants. Further, it suggests that the “extra” attention to instructional detail is important for the targeted audience.

To make an **FF-NEWS** all-purpose basket, obtain a large (*e.g.*, 12” x 14” x 6”) straw basket and approximately 3 yards of colorful wired ribbon (2” to 3” wide). To make the basket festive, spray paint it in a brilliant color (*or keep its natural color!*); with the wired ribbon, make a large bow and attach it to the handle of the straw basket; make sure that the bow is secure. [Depending on the size of the group involved in the training, consider making two baskets that are a different size or the same size.]

FFOpen Mike

Modeled after the popular talk radio phenomenon, **FFOpen Mike** is a focused discussion technique. Designed as a simulated radio talk show, it is limited to discussion of nutrition, health, and wellness issues which, by definition, include a wide range of issues: physical activity, food and culture, dieting, reliable sources of information, access to quality care, weight management, food security, food safety.

The technique is a way to involve more participants in program activities, while providing opportunities to improve communication among and between participants and about nutrition and related issues.

FFScenarios

All original, these are very short stories or situations designed to help the participant apply concepts to life-like situations, and to provide program leaders with an extra opportunity to assess how well students are grasping the information being presented. As often as possible, the stories are culturally diverse, and reflect an inclusive approach to understanding difference.



Games

Games are used as a technique to supplement and enhance the instructional component. In **FF-NEWS**, they are used most often for: (1) introducing complicated and critical concepts, (2) stimulating learning, (3) team building, (4) teaching vocabulary, and (5) varying instructional technique.

The **FF-NEWS** games are original experiential activities, and include word games, brainteasers, quizzes on facts, transfer of learning/problem solving, and icebreakers. Examples are:

- ◆ The **FF**Time Game
- ◆ Heartbreak Hotel
- ◆ Word Scrambles (e.g., *Tools of the Trade*)
- ◆ **FF-NEWS** Brainteaser

In all instances, games are used to increase participant's comfort level with learning, and their ability to understand nutrition and related concepts.

Peer Teaching

Peer teaching is the core of two instructional features: **FFBuddies**, and **FFCircles**. Both are based on cooperative learning principles and encourage active participation in learning. After having participated in several activities which call for **FFBuddies**, the participants will be familiar with breakout session procedures, (i.e., "know the drill"), and will require less start-up time. These two concepts are described briefly below:

FFBuddies - In addition to promoting responsibility for their own learning, **FFBuddies** fosters an "I've got your back, you've got mine" camaraderie, so that participants begin to care about the well-being of other trainees. To achieve the pairing, participants can pull names from a hat, select their own, or be matched by the program leader.

FFCircles - An adult learning support network based on the study circles concept. Small groups of five to seven individuals work together as a team in deriving group solutions to issues and problems discussed in the class. The **FFCircles** are participatory and diplomatic, provide social, emotional, and intellectual support for its members, promote nutrition education, leadership, and provide a supplemental avenue for continuous learning.

Each **FFCircle** should have a leader, a recorder, and a reporter. These may rotate or be assigned for the duration of the program. They may be elected by the group, self-selected, or appointed by the program leader. As desired, allow the members of the circles to name themselves.

These strategies, **FFBuddies** and **FFCircles**, draw on time-honored techniques of sharing, a sense of community, and networking. Thus, they are real opportunities to foster communication among the participants outside of the instructional experience, and to develop friendships. Providing copies of a participant list, with names, addresses, telephone numbers, names of children, etc., can foster personal growth and development among **FF-NEWS** participants in the same way the technique is used for training professionals.

Leader Resources

These are abbreviated technical summaries designed to provide readily available scientifically accurate information about a particular lesson's subject. They are *intended for use by the program leader only* to develop mini-lectures or otherwise enhance instruction. As is noted elsewhere in the module, because of time-compressed advances in scientific knowledge about nutrition and medical disorders, trainers and users of **FF-NEWS** lessons are urged to use the information lines of federal agencies (*especially Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Food and Drug Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, etc.*), and other reliable information sources for information updates.

Thinking Hats

Throughout history, the hat has been an important part of our world. Nurses and chefs, athletes and clerics, and military personnel and law enforcement officers, *et. al.*, wear hats that are readily recognized. Putting on a hat (*literally*) has been known to change an individual's attitude(!), and to cause others to take a second look! When using the "Thinking Hats," "putting on a hat" focuses a participant's thinking; "switching hats" redirects thinking.

"Thinking Hats" is a tested training technique, and has generally involved six hats. This feature is being adapted and used to promote critical thinking about nutrition, health, and wellness, using eight hats as symbols of various kinds of thinking needed to derive meaningful solutions. All of the kinds of thinking are needed as they represent different parts of the thinking process that lead to improved communication and decision making.



The eight **FF-NEWS** thinking hats are color coded as follows:

- ◆ Green — Thinking that is creative and lateral; searches for new ideas.
- ◆ White — Thinking limited to the facts and figures available.
- ◆ Red — Thinking driven by intuition, emotion, feelings, and hunches.
- ◆ Black — Thinking that looks at the elements between the lines.
- ◆ Yellow — Thinking that is positive, optimistic, and constructive.
- ◆ Blue — Thinking that guides other thinking.
- ◆ Purple — Thinking that brings the wisdom of the past into the picture.
- ◆ Brown — Thinking that brings negative aspects into the picture.

To create the thinking hats, collect an array of (*used/worn*) men's and women's hats, in a variety of colors. Ensure that at least one of the hats is green, white, red, black, yellow, blue, purple, and brown. [Used clothing stores, local charities, and discount stores are likely to be excellent sources. As an alternative, all the hats can be alike, but feature ribbons, flowers, etc. in the needed colors.]

EVALUATION

Several types of evaluation will occur as indicated below.

Program Outputs

The results of **FF-NEWS** nutrition education activities make up the program outputs. During the course of the implementation of the Program, these direct products will include type and number of educational materials produced and distributed, type and number of community service activities conducted, number of participants trained, number and type of referrals, number of classes taught/attendance per class. Analysis of these data indicate the *volume of work* accomplished under the auspices of the Program.

Participant Progress

Continuous assessment of participant progress toward objectives occurs through a variety of formal and informal assessment strategies. Formal strategies will include quizzes, questionnaires, practical tests/demonstrations, surveys, self-reports, 24-hour recalls, etc. Informal strategies will include games; interactive class activities such as role play, analysis of scenarios and other real-life simulations; and questions/answers.

Program Outcomes

Using predetermined **FF-NEWS** outcome indicators, how the program has benefitted participants will be assessed. For example, the program outcome, "improved participation in physical activity," can be assessed by the number of participants who engage in physical activity for the specified number of hours per week.

LESSON FORMAT

A common format is used for the lessons in all modules. The components of a lesson are: title, overview, materials and equipment, objectives, key teaching points, preparation, and teaching-learning sequence. Following is a terse summary of the format and the components used.

FF-NEWS LESSON FORMAT

TITLE — Indicates the name and the recommended position in the sequence of lessons.

OVERVIEW — Provides a terse summary of the lesson's core content.

MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT — Identifies the instructional aids suggested for implementing the lesson as scripted, and before site-specific customization. Care has been taken to ensure that the instructional aids, training methods, and subject matter are suited to each other, and that all are suited to the needs of the participants.

OBJECTIVES — Lists behavioral objectives for the participant.

KEY TEACHING POINTS — Lists generalized statements derived from the lesson's core content, and which are based on factual information.

PREPARATION — Lists the *major* tasks required for implementing the lesson as presented.

TEACHING-LEARNING SEQUENCE — Sets forth the procedures through which the participant is stimulated to be an active participant in her learning, acquiring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that lead to sustained behavior change.



OTHER FEATURES

Disseminating Program Information

This curriculum offers many opportunities to provide information on services and programs available about which participants may not be knowledgeable, and to make appropriate referrals. For example, the Cooperative Extension Program is a major Federal partner in disseminating information on the Children's Health Insurance Program (*CHIP*), the federal/state program directed to providing insurance for children of low-income working families. It is the intent of the program that children in families with incomes below specified levels have access to cost-effective, health care coverage if they are otherwise unable to afford coverage or to obtain it. Eligible children are enrolled and receive either free or low-cost coverage.

The lessons are designed to incorporate such information. Use the instructional opportunity to help eligible participants complete applications and enroll their children. State-specific information is available from State Departments of Health. *CHIP* is the generic name for the program; your state may have given the program a special name, (such as, *NJ KidCare in New Jersey*).

Children of participants are likely to be eligible for school-based feeding programs such as, School Breakfast and School Lunch.

Community Service

Within the curriculum, opportunities to encourage "giving back" and sharing the information and experiences of **FF-NEWS** frequently appear. In some instances these are presented as optional activities; in others they are an integral component of the concepts being taught. Everyone has skills and experiences worthy of sharing with others. We recommend helping the participants become "community ambassadors" for nutrition, health, and wellness through their participation in **FF-NEWS**-sponsored activities and events such as, walk-a-thons, kitchen safety demonstrations, diabetes cooking schools, and the like.

Partnerships

Throughout the curriculum, opportunities will be presented to partner with local disease prevention and health promotion organizations, local businesses, health and wellness professionals, and colleagues in Cooperative Extension and family and consumer sciences. Use these opportunities to involve more members of the community in the program and to leverage the resources available to the program. The expertise of health professionals may be obtained without cost from hospitals, pharmaceuticals, colleges and universities, and voluntary organizations. Use these advantageously.

Celebrating Successes

A very special dimension of **FF-NEWS** is that it offers many opportunities to recognize and celebrate success. It is recommended that as often as is possible, the program should celebrate the successes—both large and small—of participants. Encourage participants to talk about lifestyle changes being made that improve the nutritional well-being of their families, or how their own self-esteem has been enhanced.

Have the participants plan and conduct a culminating and commencement event that celebrates their successful completion of the program, and their beginning as **FF-NEWS** alumni. Establish committees or assign the tasks to the **FFCircles** (invitations, guests, program, food and beverage, arrangements, set-up, clean-up, decorations, publicity, photography, etc.). Use the event checklist (see *Resource/Reference Section*) to help guide the planning. Ideas for a festive and memorable celebration are indicated below:

- ◆ Invite representatives of local food companies and pharmaceutical companies to sponsor the celebratory event.
- ◆ Have the participants select several individuals from among themselves (2 or 3) to speak for the group at the celebration.
- ◆ Have the participants vote (*by secret ballot*) for the participant who was, "most friendly," "best participant," and the like. Award prizes and certificates to these individuals.
- ◆ Have the participants assist with the preparation of an article for the local newspaper that reports their participation in the program, and their accomplishments, including community service involvement, weight loss, etc.
- ◆ Provide each **FF-NEWS** participant a certificate heralding their completion of the program.
- ◆ Induct participants into an **FF-NEWS** alumni society.
- ◆ At the celebration, take a photograph of each participant as they receive their certificates of completion. Also, take a photograph of the "**FF-NEWS** class." Send a letter of thanks, and a copy of the photographs to each participant, along with a follow-up incentive such as an **FF-NEWS** bookmark with nutrition or food safety tips.

